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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development

Statement submitted by Association tunisienne des mères, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2008/100.

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Statement

Report on the Association tunisienne des mères panel on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development

In response to the theme of the 2008 annual ministerial review: "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development", a panel discussion was held in Paris, on 11 April 2008, in the chamber of the French Government's Economic and Social Council in the Palais de l'Iéna. The meeting was held at the initiative of the Association tunisienne des mères, in close cooperation with the Ostad Elahi Foundation: Ethics and Human Solidarity, approved and endorsed by the French Government; the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (IAESCSI); and the Chair of Sustainable Development at the Institute of Political Science.

The panel, which also brought together participants from non-governmental (the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)) and intergovernmental (the Council of Europe) organizations, United Nations staff members (the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) and academics, considered the topic of "the exercise of responsible citizenship and its impact on sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals" with a view to the formulation of recommendations.

In order to achieve more effective change at the global level, the question of responsible citizenship should be discussed and clarified at the international and local levels and the potential and modalities for action and initiatives by citizens as political, economic and social forces should be highlighted.

Citizens can intervene in all three of these areas. Through the exercise of responsibility, assuming that it can be exercised consciously, changes are being and will be made in political regimes, in the ways in which economies are organized and in the information that is available as a basis for personal choices. Since responsible citizenship and citizen action have their limits, and thus cannot be viewed as independent from efforts made in the context of international governance, the panel also focused on the interdependence of decisions made at the local level and on their impact.

Citizen action in promoting sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals

Through extensive information campaigns conducted and coordinated by the appropriate United Nations agencies and through the international mass media (including the Internet), the people of the world could be encouraged to:

- Pressure governments to ensure respect for the commitments made at international conferences and to disseminate the values of ethics and solidarity;
- Vote for political platforms that take the Goals and environmental impact into account;
- Ask their elective officials what concrete action they have taken in this area;

- Lobby rich countries to stop subsidizing their agricultural sectors to the detriment of the people of the third world;
- Choose their careers and their businesses with sustainability in mind;
- Volunteer for projects sponsored by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in this field; and
- Become responsible consumers, including by knowing the difference between useful products and unnecessary ones and realizing that having more choices than they need does not necessarily give them more freedom of choice.

Ways in which international governance can promote responsible citizenship and citizen action concerning the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development

Responsibility is becoming a major issue at international conferences, but care must be taken to ensure that "the need for individual responsibility" does not become a rhetorical argument that provides a pretext for failure to fulfil political and collective commitments. It is important to:

- Explain who is responsible for what and make it clear that failure to fulfil commitments will be punished;
- Establish the responsibility of those who apply economic theories with no concern for their impact on humankind;
- Give civil society more tools with which to promote development and the values of solidarity and ethics for all the peoples of the earth and to combat the corruption that undermines efforts to achieve those goals;
- Encourage inclusion of the world's philosophies and of democratic debate in the schools; the exercise of responsible citizenship in the context of sustainable development requires universal education in the values of citizenship and humanism;
- Hold more discussions and conduct more group studies on the theme of "subjective well-being for all", show that this is not inconsistent with the adoption of lifestyles and patterns of consumption more in keeping with the goal of sustainable development and, by so doing, encourage citizens to accept certain constraints;
  - Encourage genuine public discussion of what it means "for all of us to live well";
  - Let citizens make responsible choices as consumers and, to that end, to give everyone:
  - An opportunity to learn the source of consumer goods, how they are produced and how they will be disposed of once they have been used;
  - Information on societies that flout standards for environmental protection and decent working conditions;
  - An understanding of the concept of the "ecological footprint, which quantifies the bioproductive area that individuals and peoples need in order to produce the bulk of the resources they consume and to absorb their wastes.

Topics and concepts for reflection

We cannot call on people to exercise responsible citizenship without first calling into question and redefining the concepts of choice and freedom in order to include the idea of the global commons as a basis for the collective effort to build a responsible inheritance for the future.

Other topics for reflection with a view to more responsible citizenship might include:

- Ways to decompartmentalize national and international organizations so that they can act and think in a cross-cutting, coordinated manner;
- Ways to defragment public accountability, and thus to expand democratic debate to include all areas of governance;
- Ways for non-institutional stakeholders to have an impact on governance;
- Ways to develop strategies for solidarity that rely on shared responsibility by reconsidering the distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders (such as governments, markets, families, citizens and NGOs); and
- Ways to incorporate the precautionary principle when dealing with social issues in order not to make mistakes in the name of social development.